



The President's Daily Brief

9 July 1971

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

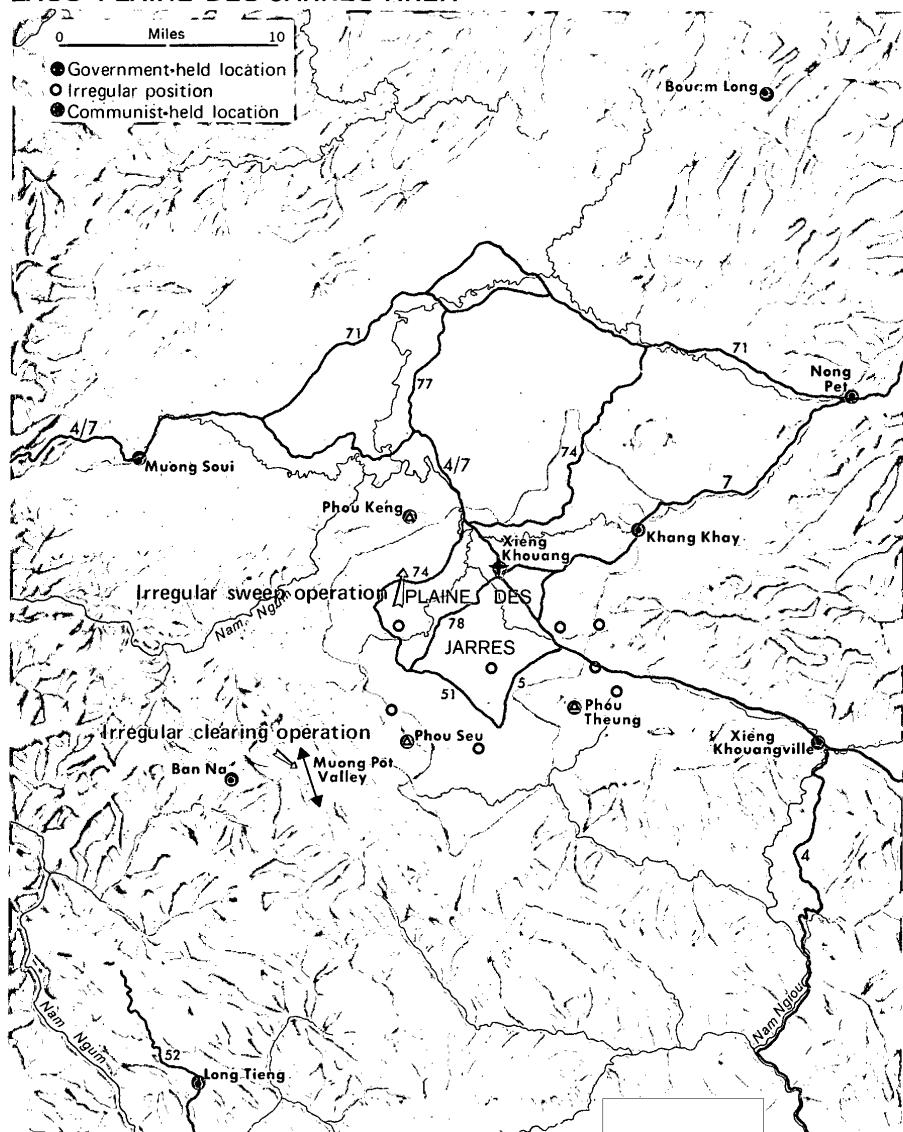
Laotian Prime Minister Souvanna has adopted a flexible tone in responding to the most recent Pathet Lao proposals. (Page 1)

There are further indications that Communist Chinese leader Kang Sheng has lost all political power. (Page 2)

At Annex we comment on some of the probable motives underlying Madame Binh's seven-point proposals.

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LAOS: PLAINE DES JARRES AREA



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LAOS

[redacted] Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma has accepted the Communist proposal that negotiations be held alternately in Vientiane and on the Plaine des Jarres. He sidestepped the Communist demand that negotiations be preceded by a country-wide cease-fire, and proposed instead a limited standdown in and around the Plaine. The talks themselves would presumably take up the larger question of a country-wide cease-fire and bombing halt, as well as other outstanding issues.

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Souvanna's show of flexibility is ostensibly an effort to get the negotiations onto the same track as last year when the two sides came close to agreeing to a limited cease-fire on the Plaine. As the government itself recognizes, however, the Communists are not likely to buy the scenario this year, particularly now that much of the Plaine is in government hands.

On the Plaine, Vang Pao's irregulars continue to press forward and are now moving northward toward Phou Keng, the dominant high ground north of the Plaine. Other irregulars are conducting clearing operations in the Muong Pot Valley some four miles east of Ban Na; the valley is thought to be a major North Vietnamese supply and logistic center. There have been Communist probes and harassing attacks against irregular outposts on the Plaine, but no major North Vietnamese assault yet appears to be developing.

Vang Pao has told the US chargé that he plans further moves to the east if enemy resistance continues to be light. He is considering moves across Route 4 into the mountainous area east of the Plaine and sending raiding parties into the Nong Pet area in an effort to interdict the Route 7/71 road junction. He stated that he was sensitive to the dangers of overextending his forces but again reiterated the line that he has authorization from Souvanna and the King to retake as much territory as possible.

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COMMUNIST CHINA

Kang Sheng, who appeared on 3 June at a reception for visiting Romanian party chief Ceausescu after being politically sidelined for over six months, "no longer occupies a post," according to Deputy Foreign Minister Macovescu. In a conversation with the US ambassador, the Romanian described Kang as a sick man who had left the hospital only to greet the delegation as a courtesy.

Kang's principal "illness" is almost certainly political. Removal of a leader of his stature--he ranked fifth on the elite politburo standing committee--for health reasons does not accord with past Chinese Communist practice.

Kang's brief reappearance indicates that the influence of leftist forces with which he has been associated has not waned completely. The continued fluidity in Peking's leadership was further underscored last week by the extraordinary fact that none of China's top officials put in a public appearance during the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Chinese Communist Party.

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VIETNAM

The Vietnamese Communists are assiduously touting both the "reasonableness" and the "flexibility" of their position as embodied in Madame Binh's seven points. This is good propaganda, of course, but there may be something besides rhetoric in what they say. Hanoi, in fact, seems to have floated a set of proposals that are as tough as ever in their basic elements, but that are meant to leave some room for negotiation.

Hanoi's two central demands are unchanged in the seven points: it still insists both on complete American military disengagement over a clearly specified period and on a new political regime in South Vietnam. Indeed, the first of these demands--and more specifically the sweeping nature of the withdrawal Hanoi is calling for--has been defined more clearly, not so much by the seven points themselves as by such spokesmen as Madame Binh herself. In her talk on 2 July with Foreign Minister Schumann she made clear that by "withdrawal" the Communists mean the removal of noncombatants, equipment, and bases as well as combatants. Moreover, the seven points attach a rider to this demand in the form of a new call for the release of "civilians" (presumably including Viet Cong cadre) captured during the war.

The statement and accompanying commentary do, however, loosen up both the second demand and the relationship between the two. By explicitly separating the first and second points, Hanoi makes it clearer than before that the US can if it wants negotiate solely on the question of its own withdrawal, leaving a political solution (points two through seven) to the Vietnamese. The Communists of course are not blind to the fact that a precipitate US withdrawal would probably cause the collapse of the Thieu government, thus rendering the six political points largely irrelevant; they probably calculate that this alone makes Washington's acceptance of point one unlikely. They may figure there is an outside chance that public opinion in the US will add impetus to reaching agreement. At a minimum, they hope they can generate fresh pressures on Washington to explore the possibilities of a negotiated settlement at the Paris talks.

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If Washington does reject point one, the Communist statement still seems to contain some negotiating latitude. We see in the last six points some effort to make more attractive the long-standing Communist demand that the US involve itself in the question of a political settlement in South Vietnam. The Communists seem to have gone out of their way to leave their latest political proposals as vague as possible, and we are left with the impression that Hanoi is saying that it will listen to alternatives concerning the nature of the political settlement and the course of events leading to it.

The Communists do insist, however, that as long as Washington plays the decisive role in supporting and protecting Saigon, it must take a leading role in the country's political reordering if the war is to end. Le Duc Tho told Anthony Lewis of The New York Times that there are many ways the Americans can do this without direct negotiations with the Communists, including manipulating the elections this fall. Implicit in his statement (and indeed in his very presence in Paris) is the notion that Washington can also negotiate with Hanoi.

Our interpretation of the seven points is conditioned by our assumptions about the way the Communists view the current US position on the war. Hanoi has acknowledged President Nixon's statements that American involvement in the war is to be ended, but the Communists want to prove that Vietnamization is not a viable route to that goal. American disengagement, they say, can come only through a negotiated alteration of the political structure in South Vietnam or through a unilateral US withdrawal regardless of the consequences to South Vietnam.

The latest flurry of activity, we believe, is designed to see if the US can be pried loose from the Vietnamization policy, either by a more explicit offer of POWs in exchange for withdrawal or by a more attractive prospect for a negotiated political settlement in South Vietnam--i.e. the first two of the seven points. The Communists say explicitly--and not surprisingly--that they would be forthcoming on the "modalities" of US withdrawal if Washington agreed to point one; they seem to hint that they would also be flexible if they found a willingness in Washington to talk about South Vietnamese politics. If they find no change in the US position on either issue, they probably will devote more energy to the attempt to prove militarily that Vietnamization is not a feasible alternative to withdrawal or political negotiation.

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